

activity to the extent that it remained under the initiative of the local underground chiefs. On the other hand it issued an opinion clearly unfavorable to its official patronage by official French agencies.

The decisions of this Commission, which was going to terminate because at least half of its members would return to France with General Navarre, were not communicated in the end to any authority capable of making a decision. I retained what was favorable to the policy which we proposed to follow: the underground fighters could continue their activity with the same intensity as previously.

Since the armistice negotiations had not begun yet, we had the possibility of setting a sharp thorn in the Viet Minh back. We were hoping that this would be a trump at the time of negotiations. On the other hand, the creation of the Committee of Liberation of the Upper Red River was really admitted.

However, during this meeting, I had been particularly struck by the language of the Special Services. It was above all necessary to keep the secret, even if it were an open secret. Preservation of the secret took precedence over the action. In short the motto of this Service could have been: Let's not do anything, but let's do it secretly. For it was evident that, since our undergrounds presented them with serious problems, the Viets would do everything to eliminate them as soon as we were no longer able to assure them protection, or at least to help them.

Following this meeting I gave the order to the Regional Representation to push their activity in all areas, and I ordered Fournier not to interrupt the preparation of the undergrounds on the left bank of the Red River, but to accelerate it to the maximum.

Victory in the High Region

On 3 June General Navarre learned of his replacement and that of Jean Letourneau by General Ely, wearing the two hats of General Commissioner and Commander-in-Chief. The first idea had been to designate General Valluy for this position, which would have been an excellent solution in view of his past and his perfect knowledge of Indochinese problems. But he held an important position in Washington which it was difficult to leave empty.

In learning of his appointment to Indochina, General Ely declared to General Salan, who came to visit him: "The toughest luck in my career has arrived; I am the one designated to be responsible civilly and militarily for Indochina. Do not abandon me. Come with me." General Salan accepted. Once more at a critical time he dedicated himself to the Army and to his country.

I personally regretted the departure of General Navarre. In him I had always found the greatest understanding and all the assistance which he had been able to give me for a mission which was not one of the easiest.

He had been a gentleman and, it was said, a specialist in 2nd Bureau problems. He had never been in Indochina. Nevertheless, he had been able to adapt himself very quickly to this theater of operations, which was different from any other in the world.

If I am permitted to judge General Navarre from my low level, I would say: I believe that the idea he had for the conduct of operations in Indochina was perfect. He should have succeeded; what hurt him was his execution. He never managed to get the obedience of his subordinates, old hands in Indochina.

I am repeating this because it is my firm conviction that, if the Dien Bien Phu operation had been achieved one month earlier instead of the Mouette operation being extended eternally, the Navarre plan, as he had anticipated it, would have evolved normally, his battle corps would have been established, and the defeat of

Dien Bien Phu would have been avoided.

With respect to General Navarre I often thought of a scene in Abel Gance's famous film, "Napoleon". Bonaparte had just been appointed Commander of the Army of Italy to replace General Scherer. Now, he was only the Vendemiaire general who had machinegunned the royalist insurgents on the steps of the Church of Saint-Roch in Paris. Some 300 or 400 of them had been killed and the counter-revolution put down. The old hands from the Army of Italy, Scherer, Augereau, Serurier and Massena, were eating their lunch somewhere in Provence under the olive trees. Little Bonaparte could be seen coming from a distance, dragging his large sword. When he was very close, all of the generals turned their backs to him. Bonaparte grabbed his sword and violently thrust it onto the table, making all of the dishes fly around. The generals abruptly turned around. Bonaparte simply said to them, "I am the Commander of the Army of Italy." At this precise moment all of them understood that Bonaparte was their chief, that he would bend the most savage wills. I believe this is the gesture which General Navarre was missing for him to succeed in Indochina.

This is how he described General Ely, who had come to replace him, to us.

"Up to the day when he took over the helm in Indochina, General Ely had held positions of a nature more diplomatic than military, and particularly had never held any important operational command. With respect to Indochina affairs, he had only the knowledge acquired during the two brief missions he had carried out in February and May. In addition his state of health prevented him from effectively adding, to the already heavy duties of General-Commissioner, the crushing ones of this crucial moment of Commander-in-Chief."

For the French Army, fighting in Indochina, he was an unknown who did not have any prestige. Probably aware of his shortcomings, he had asked General Salan to come with him. This was an excellent choice; no one knew Indochina as well as

General Salan, who, since the rank of lieutenant, had held all possible commands there at various levels and under the most difficult circumstances. Previously General de Lattre had not accepted his high duties in Indochina except under the condition of taking General Salan with him as an aide. Certainly the latter always considered being named by de Lattre a great honor. Upon the death of "King Jean", he had been appointed Commander-in-Chief. He had brilliantly handled the most complex situations.

After having performed such duties, coming back as the aide of a practically unknown leader without any prestige required rarely found qualities of humility and devotion. General Salan had accepted these subordinate functions because he knew that the Army of Indochina was in danger; his principal concern was to save it. At that point sacrifices of self-esteem no longer counted. Actually it was General Salan who took direct command in the area of military operations as soon as he returned.

For my part, I was very happy that this was the case. General Salan brought with him his faithful General-Staff leader, Colonel Gracieux, an old friend who had been in at the origin of the establishment of the GCMA and who, I knew, was ready to support us with all his weight.

Certainly the ideal solution in this difficult period would have been to give General Salan and his team complete responsibility for Indochina. The government had decided differently. Its decision had to be accepted.

As soon as he arrived, I brought General Salan up to date on the evolution of the undergrounds. He had not thought they had become so important. With Colonel Gracieux, whom I saw very often, the General asked me to complete the installation of the undergrounds on the left bank of the Red River. Gracieux had followed the Cho Quang Lo experiment in spring 1952 with great interest. He completely approved of the constitution of the Committee of Liberation of the Upper Red River. The

word marks (underground) was to be suppressed everytime it appeared in a report and replaced by the words self-defense groups and subgroup.

The GMI seal was not to appear any more.

These modifications, made to give SDEC some satisfactions, did not basically change the problem at all.

On 26 June 1954, I received a telegram directly from Colonel Morlane in Paris, informing me that I was the subject of a request for replacement. My last initiatives with respect to the CLHR constitution had made the cup overflow. As in the past, I took this telegram to the Colonel Delegate directing the SDEC to ask him what complaints had been made against me. He answered me that he did not have any, except for a few unimportant trivialities.

I took the telegram to Salan. He was unpleasantly surprised; he asked me to disregard it and to continue completely in the road in which the GMI was engaged. This perpetual defence from a device so far from Indochina and from the events occurring there, in such a critical period, had something strange about it. We were anxiously waiting for the results of the Geneva Conference. General Delell, accompanied by Colonel Fleurant, represented General Fily there. I knew that nothing would be said of our undergrounds, since the Commission which met under his chairmanship on 21 May had so decided; I was afraid that if this decision were applied, we would rapidly be forced to abandon the undergrounds to their own fate. Colonel Fleurant knew my point of view. Before his departure I insisted to him that the question of the existence of the undergrounds be stated officially. But I did not obtain any promise in this direction. Therefore I was very worried. Since the month of June we had had a new Council President, Pierre Mendes France. Changes in ministers never interested military men. They know that, no matter who the men in power are, nothing new will occur in their condition nor in the conduct of national affairs.

But, even before taking over the government, Mendes France did not hide the fact that he wanted peace. His position was formal: "We are on the eve of a disaster," he had said, and "It must be treated at any price".

As soon as he took over, he stated his famous wager: "I will make peace before 20 July or I shall resign". Now, nothing is easier than making peace when it is wanted at any price, and when one is ready to make any concessions to obtain it. Taking this position could only stimulate the enemy to harden his attitude and to oblige our negotiators, in order to avoid the resignation of the President, to be conciliatory to the extreme.

Therefore I was sure that there would be no mention of the underground at Geneva. The Viet Minh would have the utmost reticence in recognizing them. In doing so there would be an admission that a large part of the mountainous region, where they claimed to reign as absolute masters, would escape them. It was necessary to draw the consequences from this situation: since the High Committee of Liberation of the Upper Red River was not officially recognized, it followed that my undergrounds would be abandoned.

In Tonkin Fournier, pressed by the underground leaders and members of the Committee of Liberation of the Upper Red River, requested that the last phase of activation of the undergrounds be begun quickly. However, these men were perfectly aware of our defeat at Dien Bien Phu. But they wanted to take advantage of the rainy season, which would immobilize the regular Viet troops, to take over the greater part of the High Region. They had full confidence in themselves, in their troops and in the people.

For me this was a case of conscience. I was now sure that we would abandon them and that they would be subjected to atrocious reprisals on the part of the Viets and would lack any firm support for their defense. I thought it best to wait for the results from the Geneva Conference.

However, However, for Fournier and all of his native and French officers, for all of the people who had put so much hope in them, for the men in the Special Missions, the establishment of this underground would be the crowning point of work carefully prepared for months and promising us a brilliant success. It would also be the confirmation of what I had previously said: "All of the mountaineers are with us".

To rally them and make them able to defend themselves, we had developed a method which had every chance of success.

Before going into action at the beginning of July, I explained the complexity of the situation to General Salan.

"It must be done," he said to me. "This will be a real thorn in the feet of the Viets. We cannot predict how events will turn out. It may always be useful."

Therefore I gave Fournier and his team the green light, which they had been impatiently awaiting.

The leader of the underground, a young Mao 25 years old, had come to Hanoi himself to hasten the beginning of the operation. The latter commenced on 7 July with the parachute drop of two commandos of 60 men each in the Pa Kha region, the county seat.

The Viets took refuge in the Tachan house and in the old post. Three B-26's, dropping several bombs on the old post, were enough for them to surrender without really having defended themselves. Then there was an outburst of enthusiasm among the entire population which was freed from the Viet grip. On the request of the Special Missions, weapons were parachuted in lots of 100 to anticipated points, accompanied by small groups of native commandos instructed in the training centers, all of whom waited impatiently to be parachuted as conquerors into their country.

The underground took over the entire region like a brush fire. On 10 July the small Beaver strip at Pa Kha was restored. On the morning of 11 July Captain Mourier, who had directed this enormous operation, landed there. No French officer had been there since 1945.

In two weeks all of the immense triangle encompassed by the Red River, the China border, Hagiang, and the edges of Bac Quang and Luc An Chau, joined the underground fighters. It included more than 35,000 inhabitants.

After Pa Kha, Hoang Su Phi was occupied without resistance. Some 200 villages were completely liberated, 2500 underground fighters had been parachuted, 3,000 partisans had been recruited and armed, 120 Viet soldiers had come to our side with their weapons, and 350 others had been killed or disabled.

Such was the balance sheet of our last underground, the development of which was not stopped ^{by} the cease-fire, since the old stations of Nghia Do and Yen Bin Xa were still rallying on 31 July. Our intelligence teams were received well at Hagiang, and interesting contacts were made in the Cao Bang region.

On 20 July Mendes France won his wager, which no one had doubted.

The dates of the cease-fire were the following:

North Vietnam: 27 July at 8 a.m.

Central Vietnam: 1 August at 8 a.m.

South Vietnam: 11 August at 8 a.m.

Cambodia: 7 August.

Laos: 6 August.

The elections would take place in two years to decide on the unification of Vietnam.

I had learned of the armistice conditions quite rapidly. There was no question of the undergrounds or of recognition of the CLMFR. Therefore they were going to be abandoned. From 20 to 27 July at midnight we parachuted with all available airplanes tons of ammunition and food to the new underground fighters and to the Cardamone fighters.

On the 25th the leader of the Chocolat zone underground came to Hanoi. He was excited by the welcome which all the mountain people had given him. He knew

that we would be obliged to abandon him. He did not show any bitterness about this. He asked that all of his underground fighters, who were still being trained in the training centers, be parachuted to their region.

Then on the afternoon of the 27th, he had himself parachuted at Pa Kha.

In the GMI we had two American liaison officers. It was the Americans who provided us with the armament and radios. Twice I had made a complete explanation of the GCMA-GMI situation to high American officials. This then was a problem which interested them to the greatest degree. We knew, and we shall show it more later, that they were trying in every possible way to become involved in our affairs in Indochina and to replace us, if possible.

The cease-fire, which we would have to apply, would force us to cease all flights over the High Region and, consequently, to give up feeding the underground fighters. I asked the Americans to study with their mission in Indochina how they could relieve us and guarantee food for our undergrounds, for example, from the Philippines.

But they refused under the pretext of observing strict neutrality. The underground fighters of the High Tonkin were going to be delivered up to their own fate.

The End of the Undergrounds

At the beginning of August I came back to Saigon, the headquarters of the GMI General-Staff. In re-establishing contact with the officers of General Salan's General-Staff, I quickly realized that the Ely-Salan team did not have the solidity of the de Lattre-Salan team. While General Ely had been afraid to have to direct military operations once in his life, now that General Salan had gotten off easily, the former made the latter clearly feel that he was not needed, and that the former was only waiting for the chance to remove him and conduct his own policy.

One day, in the first half of August, we heard these bewildering words uttered by General Ely on Radio Saigon:

"In Indochina I prefer a strong and anti-French government to a weak and pro-French government."

The word anti-French, pronounced with a certain amount of satisfaction by the highest representative of France in Indochina, and a general at that, in a country where the Army had permitted such great sacrifices and where so many bonds of affection connected us, had aroused deep emotion, not only among the French civilians and military personnel, but also in the mass of Vietnamese who were deeply devoted to us. The number of telephone calls which General Ely and his General-Staff must have received led him to make a new statement the next day on Radio Saigon:

"I am anxious," he said, "to express my thoughts more precisely. I said yesterday and I repeat today that in Indochina I prefer a strong and anti-French government to a weak and pro-French government."

Nothing more was needed to wrap it up. We asked what we were doing in this country, since the representative of France responsible for applying the armistice, did not care a bit whether we kept the sympathy of the Indochinese or not. This unknown general, of whom one could wonder by what mystery he had reached such a high status, and whom journalists later considered as the conscience of the French

Army, was actually nothing but a willy-nilly, inconsistent and quite incapable in this extremely difficult period of expressing either our friends or enemies, and consequently of preserving for France the mission which it had in this country. Toward the end of August I received a telegram from SDECE in Paris inviting me to hand over as quickly as possible command of Service 49 (GMI was nothing but a cover for Service 49, i.e., Action Service in Indochina) to Captain Bonnafeux, a mainland artillery man who had arrived in Indochina several months before. The GMI, as a troop corps, was to be dissolved. Beginning in October I was to undertake command of the agency liquidating the GMI, but the direction of the Action Service was to be taken away from me from now on. The reason I had fought until then to preserve my position was because I had begun an important mission, and I wanted to finish it; this was also why I had always had confidence in General Navarre. General Salan was ready to support me, but General Ely and his staff took over the direction of affairs more and more, showing no interest in the GMI activity. I was going to try to maintain myself for one month more in order not to abandon the young comrades whom I had brought into this adventure, in order to defend them. Thanks to the support of General Salan, I was able to remain at the head of the GMI for the month of September in order to try to salvage whatever could be saved. The pretext was to coincide its termination with that of my regulation command time as a colonel, which is six months in operations instead of two years as in peacetime. Actually I had been appointed lieutenant-colonel on 1 April 1954. Captain Bonnafeux, sent from France by the SDECE, was certainly an excellent comrade. First surprised at having to relieve me, he proved to be a little frightened. I promised to help him as well as I could, if he continued to think he needed my assistance, which I greatly doubted.

The South Vietnam Regional Representation was guaranteed by Captain Conill. Certainly it did not have the importance of the Tonkin, Laos or Central Annam Regional Representations. Actually the South was practically pacified. There were only a few rare regular Viet units in zones which were difficult to reach from the Plaine des Jongs, the Camao peninsula and north of the plantations. Therefore it was not a matter of large undergrounds, but rather of commandos which managed to spread out to a great distance and assure security, e.g., around the plantations.

Since 1950 the appearance of regular Viet divisions and the threat which they held for Tonkin had led the Command to take men from the troops in the south, who therefore never had the resources to finish the pacification, although it was within their grasp.

However, thanks to Conill, we played a more subtle game: communication with the sects which, after taking part in the rebellion in the beginning, had come back to us. These were the Cao daists, the Hoa Hao, the Bai Xuen and the Catholics. In close association with Major Savani, my class comrade, Conill was perfectly aware of their development, their goals and their negotiations.

He also kept an eye on the Americans, especially some of them who tried to create a third force in Indochina, anti-French and anti-communist at one and the same time, with the avowed purpose of ridding Indochina of us as quickly as possible and taking our place.

We had always known that the Americans were against us in Indochina. General de Gaulle had supported the entrance of Indochina into the war against the Japanese in order to attend the treaty of peace ending the war in the Pacific. In so doing he had forced the small French Army in Indochina into a massacre; on 9 March 1945, with our troops crushed and our administration overthrown, the States of Indochina, except for Laos, had proclaimed their independence. It is true that General

Leclerc had signed the treaty ending the war in the Pacific in Tokyo in August 1945. But this treaty confirmed our eviction from the country, since the Japanese troops were disarmed by the Chinese north of the 16th parallel and by the English to the south. Our return was not even anticipated.

Actually the entry of Indochina into the war was a catastrophe for this country, and the consequences are still being felt today. Since that time the Americans, by more or less decent processes, have done everything to prevent our return. While the Americans had granted us financial and material aid after the arrival of the Chinese communists on the Tonkin border in 1950, it had never been to defend our interests in Indochina, but to use our Army against the communist menace with the ulterior motive of eliminating us once peace was re-established.

In the book which I have already mentioned, General Navarre puts it perfectly:

"The United States, who had always been hostile to us, remained so although they had become our allies. They helped us materially but fought us morally. While completely using the French "pawn", essential for their anticommunist game, they worked to undermine our interests until they were destroyed. This intrusion into our affairs was particularly the work of an "Economic Assistance Mission", the members of which were very often representatives of particular interests under their cover of officers or officials. But in this area the French government had committed a grave error. For sordid financial considerations it had asked the Americans to completely take over aid to the armies of the Associated States."

In July 1953 General Navarre had asked that the financial contributions of the United States be given totally to France, with France being responsible for distributing them among the Associated Armies according to their real needs. Our Minister of Finances at the time, Edgar Faure, persuaded that he would obtain several billions more, accepted the other formula. From this day on our influence on these

Armies declined rapidly in favor of the Americans. We thus lost our main means of control over them.

France Buu Loc, who had replaced Mr. Tan in January 1953 as the Council President, actually assured only an interregnum. He was soon replaced by Mr. Ngo Dinh Diem, whose hatred for France was well known.

The GMI received the mission of morally preparing for his accession to power to the extent of its resources, persuaded that he would be only a brief interim while the rare pearl was being sought. We were told that it was necessary to foreclose the mortgage on those who could not rally to the majority of votes because they were Catholic. When he arrived at Tan Son Nhut, the first words which he uttered were the following:

"I have come to eliminate the last traces of French colonialism."

He seemed to ignore the fact that, throughout the Indochinese territory, thousands of Frenchmen had sacrificed their lives only to save this country from communism and to assure its independence. These few words had not been made to cement his sympathy in the Army, with the French in general and with all of the Vietnamese who had placed their confidence in France. He was the man of the Americans; he was going to get away from us and it would be impossible for the French government to change him. From the beginning he had demonstrated his intention of eliminating the sects which had been loyal to us, which represented close to two million fiercely anti-Viet Minh inhabitants, and who had greatly helped us in the pacification of South Vietnam.

Aware of the danger, the representatives of the sects and of the old political parties joined to create the RPV (Assembly of Vietnam Patriots). On 1 May 1954 the RPV established a program of action and a draft constitution, adapted to the circumstances but very liberal. Here is what it anticipated with respect to relations with the different partners.

1. France. "Negotiate new agreements with France. Obtain the mass transfer of powers still held by the French civilian and military authorities, so that the Vietnamese can see in a clear and indisputable way that their country is really independent.

The new treaty, based on the principle of an equal association, will concede cultural and economic privileges to France, and the right of settlement of French in Vietnam with the reciprocal right of Vietnamese to settle in France.

The RPV will particularly apply itself to seeing that the agreements are totally and faithfully applied. It will recommend the creation of a Commission to Control the Application of the Agreements.

2. The United States. The RPV will suggest that the United States continue to aid us (but not to buy us), that the United States try to reach agreement with the USSR in order to bring a halt to the cold war and to neutralize Vietnam at least temporarily (ten to 20 years, time for the country to rise from its ruins).

3. China. Geography forces us to have a non-aggression policy vis-a-vis China. Independent Vietnam will recognize the Peking government and will sign a non-aggression pact with it.

4. The Viet Minh. The RPV is an assembly of all political parties with a common denominator. The only categorical imperative is "Vietnam first". It will be glad to accept communist Vietnamese if they adhere to this principle. The RPV will try to convince the Viet executives of the need to put a halt to a war which, if it continues, will bring about the total ruin of our country and its subjugation to a foreign power (China or the United States). The two camps can reach agreement on the following policy: (really) free elections six months or one year after the conclusion of an agreement. Freedom, checked by neutral parties, in the propaganda of the political parties in the two zones. Election by nominal universal suffrage. The elected assembly will compose a constitution which the authorities of the two

zones will promise to apply.

The sects were looking for a sufficiently representative man, honest, enjoying the confidence of the Vietnamese and the French, and capable of carrying out the policy which they intended to conduct. They addressed General Xuan, a former chief of the provisional government, a former Polytechnical student, and an artillery colonel in the French Army.

In order to learn his intentions I asked Captain Conill to meet him; he was well acquainted with the general's son-in-law, Mr. Lam Tham Nghe, a member of the Saigon Municipal Council. Therefore it was possible for him to meet the prospective chief through Mr. Lam Tham Nghe. We prepared a questionnaire which was to serve as a basis for this kind of interview. In this way on 11 August 1954 Conill was able to meet General Xuan. Here is the essence of Xuan's proposals:

"The nationalistic map, played by France somewhat regretfully, made it lose the advantage of its liberal inclinations and has encouraged the nationalists to a wait-and-see policy. The outcome of Geneva is a result of uncertainties in the previous French governments, which never succeeded, on a question of national interests, to escape from equivocation and demonstrate a firm will. On the local level the apparent incoherence of military activity was only the translation of the insufficient means put into operation. The rise in the risks imposed determined and decisive action to try to improve the situation before the Chinese communists reached the border.

"This possibility existed; the necessary effort was not delivered.

"In short, from 1951 on this policy, which had a chance of succeeding with the sincere support of all of our allies, had reached an impasse in all areas.

--And you believe that Pierre Mendes France has brought you out of the impasse.

"Exactly, the Geneva accord, which has only the heroism of the combatants as a moral counterweight, leaves Vietnam a chance to escape communism.

"It is up to the Vietnamese national lists to seize this chance and up to the entire western world to support it!"

Then he added what I believe to be the major element of the interview:

"If between now and 20 July 1956 a free, independent and honest regime, aimed toward social and economic progress, is established in the part of the national territory south of the 17th parallel, it is impossible that the Vietnamese, including those of the north among whom the die-hard communists are certainly in the minority, will not choose a political formula different from pure and simple subordination to the regime of Mao Tse Tung. I am convinced that the leaders of the Viet Minh are not really looking for such a result.

"I repeat, good or bad, the cease-fire is the result of the hesitations which have brought us to the impasse. From between disaster and total war, Mr. Pierre Mendes France has selected this way out, and this evidence should teach moderation to those, Vietnamese and French, who might still not feel the impropriety of rejecting the surrender which they have done everything to make inevitable."

Then came the last question.

—Do you believe that a popular debate should be organized right now south of the 17th parallel?

"The sooner the better," the General answered. "The Vietnamese people, who have been constantly held from power since the juridical realization of unity and recognition of our independence, will not agree to guarantee a government which they have not chosen, nor to give their support, neither today nor tomorrow, to a policy which is not theirs on any point.

"It is finally necessary for France to understand that in Vietnam there are Vietnamese, not the chosen select few, installed and honored by France to complete

the empire of its overseas institutions, but the real people, with their passions, their mistakes, their virtues, and all the categories of its sons, including those who have rebelled against it, in contradistinction to the symbolic figures of an old past.

"On this ground I believe that we can put confidence in Pierre Mendes France, who has just chosen in Tunisia negotiators whom his predecessors had had thrown into prison."

I asked Captain Conill to closely follow this question, which appeared to me of the greatest interest in the current situation. I also spoke of it to General Salan, who asked me to inform him regularly of developments in this matter.

Between 16 and 20 August I received a number of peices of information which can be summarized thus:

1) About 200 members of the municipal councils of the principal towns of Cochinchina have just signed a motion favoring General Xuan to carry him to power. General Xuan is in agreement.

2) The Cao daist pope is favorable to this movement, under the reservation that he has the support of the French.

3) The Hoa Hao made the same response, as did the Catholics of Colonel Leroy.

4) The socialist party and the Dai Viet have given their agreement.

A few days later General Xuan, after meeting with Le Van Vien, the chief of the Binh Xuyen (the chief of police at Saigon-Cholon), confirmed his acceptance.

General Hinh, the chief of the general staff of the Vietnamese Army, also put himself at the disposition of General Xuan, declaring that the latter was the only one he could obey.

A ministry was drawn up on paper, excluding the former president of the Republic of Cochinchina, Mr. Hoach, and the former council chairmen, Hu and Tan. The purpose was to form a provisional republican government intended to replace his

Majesty Bao Dai and President Dien. From the beginning it would stress its authority over:

the current municipal councils;

a provisional national assembly to be elected within the next two months, which would rapidly make contact with the Viets, in particular for the re-establishment of regular economic connections. Having neither army nor police, he asked for the support of the French. If this support were not forthcoming, he envisaged dissidence fated to create a psychological shock and grouping:

The Catholics of Colonel Leroy;

The Hoa Hao;

The Cao daists.

On 20 August the RPV forwarded a note to me, the essence of which was:

"The failure of the Bao Dai experiment has led the policy of France in Indochina to an impasse, and Vietnam is in a tragic situation. Following the Geneva accords, the ratios of power have changed; we are facing a new situation. Despite the recently acquired independence the entire future of this country (still a young nation) depends largely on the perspicacity and the speed of decision-making by those responsible for the French policy.

"The High Commissariat of France in Indochina has a great many possibilities for winning the political battle joined since the signature of the Geneva accords, but no plan has been instituted yet, while since 20 July propaganda and all opposing cogwheels (secret services, groups, secret police, assault commandos, infiltration, etc.) have been deeply involved in this speed race.

"With the existing human capital France can help in the construction of a national army to deliver Vietnam from this impasse by favoring a peaceful revolution. Having established Bao Dai, it has every necessary means of pressuring him:

"--to proclaim the end of his mission (that of restoring the country to independence);

"--to restore power to a committee of the people composed of honest patriots who will support an elected national assembly.

"In return Bao Dai will be offered a civilian position and certain advantages.

"But France must remain neutral on the international level. It must not appear to be becoming involved in the internal affairs of Vietnam, but to observe a beneficent neutrality which will certainly assure success.

"The movement could begin in September by:

"--sending a delegation to General Ely and particularly to General Salan, who knows the country very well.

"--sending a delegation to Paris to Mendes France."

I had never looked for these contacts, which were beyond the framework of my assignments. They were particularly the deed of Captain Couill, who, in the south, had always enjoyed excellent relationships with the sects. Furthermore, the fact that these various plans were addressed to me is largely due to the fact that everyone knew that I had known General Salan for a long time, that it would be easy for me to transmit them to him, and because the long past of the General in Indochina, the contacts he had always enjoyed with the various political parties, his wide understanding of local problems, and the affection which he bore to the Vietnamese people as a whole, made him the most qualified intervenor in the success of this venture.

But since the military operations--an area where his incompetence was famous--had ceased, General Ely had no more need of General Salan. He was determined to conduct the policy which he understood. The break between the General Staff of General Salan and that of Ely became more and more obvious. I noticed it myself after my return to Saigon, thanks to my frequent contacts with Colonel

Gracieux and with General Salan.

Once again it was an aberration to trust the fate of Indochina at such a critical moment to General Ely and to a team which was completely ignorant of the country and of its destiny. In 1945-1946 the French government had preferred Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu to General Leclerc. Now it preferred Ely to Salan. The consequences were going to be even more serious.

The definitive break took place on 20 September 1954.

In the aircraft which was taking them to Indochina, Ely, knowing that he would often have to be absent, had given the general order setting Salan's assignments. The latter was to be temporarily in charge of the functions of the General Commissioner and of Commander-in-Chief during the absence of General Ely.

Now, on 20 September General Ely had to go to the United States. On the way in the automobile he said to General Salan, who accompanied him to the airstrip:

"During my absence I have decided to entrust the actions of the General Commissariat to Ambassador Daridan. From now on you will only assume the functions of Commander-in-Chief."

General Salan immediately replied:

"That is contrary to the commitments you have made with respect to me and which you have informed me of in writing. This is breaking your word. In addition, it is pejorative, for I have no feeling of being blameworthy. Therefore, since you are going to Paris, I ask you to inform the government that I request a return to France. During your absence I shall assume responsibility for military affairs. You can leave without any worries."

Thus it was done. The fate of Indochina was going to be put into the hands of men who, I had the feeling, were not even aware of the responsibilities which would be theirs.

At the beginning of September, after having discussed with Captain Conill the contacts which he had made, and those which I had made myself, and having seen Colonel Gracieux a number of times, I requested to see General Salan himself.

The General knew that his role in Indochina was finished and that he no longer had any influence on General Ely, who worked with his General Staff behind closed doors.

He was aware of the facts which I was going to present to him, since I had kept him regularly informed either directly or through Colonel Gracieux. He said to me:

"We cannot do anything; we are completely disarmed. If I forwarded your papers, I would certainly not be listened to. I am not kept aware of the policy which General Ely intends to conduct, if there is such a thing. I know neither what he wants nor where he wants to go. I do not understand his attitude. Perhaps I am annoying the General with my stubbornness in respecting to the letter the agreements which the Viet Minh has too great a tendency to overlook. I shall not be much longer in this position where, from day to day, I am losing my influence.

"The Americans are trying to take us in all areas. Ely, who has always associated with them, is certainly not the man capable of defending himself against them."

"The Americans are against the sects who have always favored us. Ely, who knows nothing about the problems of Indochina and their subtlety, is also against the sects, but without knowing why. We can no longer support them. Up to the present we have been the ones to support them, arm them, and pay them in various ways with money given to us by the Americans. They could have the illusion that this was our money and that their survival depended on us. Now the Americans are supporting them directly. They have gone as far as paying toadies in their ranks, such as Trin Minh The, to abandon them so that they are completely free of us.

"You see, Trinhster," concluded the General, "these are problems which we could solve in the best interests of the Indochinese peoples and of France, as we could have done in 1946, if we had demonstrated a great deal of understanding; once more, by a sort of aberration which I cannot come to understand, we are going to miss the boat."

I left with my file. I had thought it would be of great importance, and it had become useless. I did not know what to do with it.

It was absolutely useless for me to speak of it or to forward it to the SDECE Colonel Delegate. I knew that he was on very good terms with General Ely. Under the best of conditions my papers would have been put into the basket, and at worst they would have been returned to me with a request for an explanation, accompanied as usual with a request for severe sanctions and perhaps for my immediate relief. Now, I intended to stay as long as possible, no longer to continue the policy undertaken by the GMI, but to aid our comrades to get out of it, comrades whom I had involved in this undertaking and many of whom were risking their skin.

Ten years later, when I again found these documents in my personal files, I noticed that I had not signed them. I had waited to do this until I was sure of being able to forward them to an authority who would have paid some attention to them; I had not found one.

I am still convinced today that, if France had supported General Xuan and facilitated the establishment of a new and really democratic government in the south, one enjoying undisputed authority, the latter would have been able to make contact with the north and organize general elections within the prescribed time limits, i.e., two years. The unification of Vietnam could have been achieved by the anticipated date.

France, which had signed the Geneva accords, was largely responsible for their execution. It had the duty of seeing to their application. It rejected

this duty; the Americans did not want these accords to be applied. Diem, who had become their man, claimed that he had not signed them, and in turn decided to consider them void.

Actually we had been beaten at Dien Bien Phu, but we had saved half of Indochina from communism. Since the cease-fire, peace reigned everywhere. The Viet Minh had moved to the north the few regular units which had infiltrated the Plaine des Jones, the Camao peninsula and several regions of very difficult access. The Americans and their practical unscrupulous businessmen had determined to replace us in the rich territory which we had pacified.

Our most dangerous enemy was an American economic mission, the avowed purpose of which was to replace us in all areas and by any means.

The principal agent which the Americans recruited from among the sects was Trin Minh The, who in principle fulfilled the functions of the leader of the General Staff of the Cao daist troops. Trin Minh The had come to our side and had left in disagreement a number of times, without anyone knowing exactly why. Now we knew why: he had been bought by the Americans and was openly working against us. The principal intelligence agent whom we had at Saigon to watch over the anti-French activities of the American economic mission was a strange person whom Captain Conill had somehow recruited. He was the leader of the pickpocket gang of Saigon. He had men infiltrated everywhere. The profession which they practiced demanded an enormous amount of finesse and dexterity.

Certainly Conill had nothing at stake in this venture. But a number of times he had intervened with the police to have one of the pickpockets released. In addition he facilitated their removal from Saigon. The surveillance network of the gang was very effective. Here is a little amusing story on this subject.